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ABSTRACT

Today there are more female administrators than a mere 15 years ago, yet these women who have risen up through the ranks to a position traditionally dominated by men tend not to advocate equity in their schools. Nineteen female principals from Arizona, California, and Oregon were interviewed using the critical incident technique. Results show that while the women principals tended to be more concerned with instructional leadership, classroom teaching, and intensive interaction with the faculty than their male counterparts, only modest passive gestures were made toward initiating equity programs or activities within their schools. Although female principals face unique problems of identity and integration, they fail to translate their own experiences into action to ensure greater equity; instead, they take a personalized view of their experiences. Preservice programs fail to educate prospective administrators on the theory that schools themselves perpetuate gender/race inequality. Thus, women administrators have not been trained to be sensitive observers of inequality in school organizations. It cannot be presumed that simply because a woman is in a place of administration in the school, issues of equity will be addressed. A lack of understanding of the concept of gender leads a female administrator to insensitivity and inattention to equity in school ideology and practice. (33 references) (KM)

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WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS' VIEWS ON SEX EQUITY:

EXPLORING ISSUES OF INFORMATION, IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION

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WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS' VIEWS ON SEX EQUITY: EXPLORING ISSUES OF INFORMATION, IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION

During the past 15 years there has been a modest increase of women as school administrators. Whereas in 1974 women represented 15% of all school officials and administrators, their representation grew to 21% in 1980 and 25% in 1985. In 1974 women comprised 15% of principals and assistant principals, in 1980 they represented 17.1% and 21% in 1985. As superintendents and associate superintendents women were 3% in 1970, 9% in 1981 and 16% in 1985. (see Jones and Montenegro, 1985).

Women who took positions in school administration during the past 15 years were the beneficiaries of the national attention directed at women's absence in educational governance. Women were encouraged to seek administrative positions by passage of Title IX, the federal directives for affirmative action, initiatives such as Project AWARE, (sponsored by the Ford Foundation and under the auspices of the American Association of School Administrators), research and action projects supported by the Women's Educational Equity Act Project, technical assistance supplied by the Sex Desegregation Centers, and the resources and services of regional advocacy groups, such as the Northwest Women in Educational Administration and the Northeast Coalition of Education Leaders. In addition, the veritable explosion of knowledge that came forth in the 70's and 80's about women's lives and concerns established a a supportive cultural context for women to seek positions in formerly male-dominated roles for details see, Adkison, 1981, Biklen and Brannigan, 1980: Pottker

and Fishel, 1977; Gross and Trask, 1976; Havens, 1980; Sadker and Sadker, 1985; Ortiz, 1982; Schmuck, 1975, 1981; Shakeshaft, 1987; Spender and Sarah, 1980.)

Considering that many women took administrative positions at the same time that the national sentiment and mandates actively supported equal employment and equal educational opportunities, we raised questions about how those women viewed their responsibility toward providing equity in schools. For example, would those new female administrators give attention to equity policies and practices in our public schools? Would women administrators be sensitive to gender and race discrimination and bias? Would they advocate for an equity agenda in their schools and districts?

One study, conducted by Adkison (1982), suggested that women administrators would be sensitive to issues of sex bias and be advocates for equity. Adkison studied state and district officers charged with implementing equity mandates and found women and minorities tended to be advocates for equity whereas white men tended to be administrators of compliance. She argued individuals who have personal experience with institutional discrimination would be more sensitive to bias and advocate for change.

We expected that women principals would tend to be equity advocates since many had experienced institutional discrimination and because many women administrators attended workshops or conferences about sex bias in educational administration.

Methodology

We conducted interviews with nineteen women principals in Oregon, California and Arizona using the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954). That interview method uncover key dimensions of human performance in a wide variety of occupations (for example, see Fivars, 1980). It is well suited for identifying what educational administrators do to integrate the principles of educational equity into their school agendas.

The critical incident technique consists of procedures for obtaining behavioral descriptions. The behaviors may have had a positive or negative impact on the outcome being investigated. The key features of the critical incident approach are that:

- interview questions are open-ended, so respondents do not choose from a predetermined set of answers,
- responses focus on actual events; descriptions of events must be explicit about what an individual actually did,
- responses include statements of outcomes so the consequences of an event are known,
- descriptions of events must contain contextual information so a reader will understand what happened without being present.

We recorded incidents on a form structured to elicit a brief description of the situation in which the behavior occurred; the specific details of the events leading to the situation, a specific account of what the person did, an analysis of why it had a positive or negative effect, and if it had a negative effect, a description of what would have been a better action. We asked for at least one event in each of the following four areas: 1) the over-all school policies or practices for which the administrator was responsible; 2) specific equity practices for which the administrator was responsible; 3) personal experiences with race or sex discrimination; and 4) perceptions about whether being female makes a difference as an educational leader.

We conducted either telephone or personal interviews with 19 women principals in Oregon, California and Arizona. Schmuck and Schubert conducted all the interviews, except three which were conducted by a staff member of the Center for Educational Equity at AIR. Since this was an exploratory study we chose to talk to women administrators we knew, fifteen of whom had participated in at least one conference, seminar or institute for women in administration. Our sample represents a mix of employment history, equity advocacy, feminist identity, and rural, urban, suburban, large and small school settings. Table 1 profiles our sample of interviewees.

Table 1

Profile of Interviewees

Years as a Principal

School Level	N	0-5	6-10	11-15
Elementary	11	7	4	
Middle	3	2		1
High	5	3		2
				Total=19

Age

30 - 35	3
36 - 40	4
41 - 45	7
45+	5
total=19	

Ethnicity

Black	4
Asian	1
Hispanic	1
Anglo	13
Total=	19

Our interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Our results are organized by each of the four themes: 1) educational concerns, 2) equity concerns, 3) perceptions of discrimination 4) perceptions of being a woman administrator.

Results About Educational Concerns: There was no instance of sex or race equity given in response to the question about general educational policies or practices for which they were responsible. All interviewees expressed concerns about instructional improvement and the environment of teaching and learning. We heard examples of improved discipline policies, of changing a tracked system of grouping to increased heterogeneity, of increasing students involvement in decision making, increasing

teacher sensitivity to the "at-risk" students, increased parental involvement with special needs students and increased staff participation in decision making. Many of the interviewees wanted to have others participate more fully in decision making. Those results are consistent with the research by Gross and Trask (1976), Charters and Jovick (1981), and Shakeshaft (1987) asserting that women school principals, compared to men, tend to be more concerned with instructional leadership and affairs pertaining to classroom teaching, that they interact more intensively with the faculty and are more participatory in school management.

Results About Equity Concerns: Responses occurred at four different levels. The levels range from 0 to high with respect to institutionalization of equity. A (0) rating means no example was given; a low rating (1) indicates a single awareness event has taken place, such as displaying posters on equity laws or about sex-stereotyping in toys or games, asking "role models" to speak in class, or encouraging a girl or minority student to be a school leader. These we interpret as modest, passive gestures toward providing equity. The mid-rating (2) suggests a more serious effort at addressing equity concerns but one which falls short of incorporating a policy or principle into the educational system. Examples include a staff development program on an equity topic, a career awareness day, or observing Black History Month or Women's History Week. Such events usually engage a group of students or educators for a short time. The highest rating (3) is given when an equity policy or practice enters the

educational enterprise as a normal way of doing business. Such practices include; selection committees using non-sexist and non-racist criteria for selecting class resources, establishing recruitment policies for classes where some groups of students are under-represented, or eliminating sexist and racist disciplinary practices. At level (3) equity concerns become part of school practice and policies; there is an expressed concern for recognizing race and sex as critical criteria for determining fairness in school life.

Table 2 shows the distribution of equity concerns at their highest level of concern expressed by the 19 interviewees. That is, individuals citing Level 3 examples may have given Level 1 or Level 2 responses also. There were five individuals who gave no response, eight gave only Level 1 responses, two gave at least one example of a Level 2 response and four gave at least one example of a Level 3 response. There were 28 examples given, 17 examples at level 1, 4 at level 2, and 7 at level 3.

Table 2

Distribution of Persons Citing Examples

Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	
5	8	2	4	= Total, 19 persons

Distribution of Examples of Equity Concern

17	4	7	= Total, 28 examples

Although there is a mixture of responses on the continuum, the responses are polarized. The majority of responses are at Level 1, the introductory level, which include women noting their

presence as female role models in administration yet they did not carry out any special equity programs or activities. Those at the highest level were more comprehensive; they mentioned selection criteria in choosing curriculum materials and had on-going activities for students or employees. Two black principals, scored at level 3, reported efforts to celebrate Martin Luther King Day, using racially fair text books, working with the black dialect, and expressed concern about poor and black kids being in the lower tracked groups, Concerns about sex equity, however, were not included in their comments. Only two women principals reported activities regarding gender. All four were elementary school principals.

Interviewees were also asked directly about gender differences in academic outcomes, particularly in math and science. Most were aware of the problem but none had examined school test scores on the basis of gender nor indicated a plan to do so.

Results about Perceptions of Discrimination:

The majority of the women in our sample, especially those who attained their positions within the last five years, reported experiencing no sex discrimination in their careers. They cited support and encouragement from their peers and superordinates. Yet, many of those same women who reported no discrimination also reported differential treatment because of their sex. One said, "There is a parent club run by two men; they tried to railroad me out of the parent club." A black female reported, "The community did not want to accept me. It was blue collar working class

community. That was hard." Another black woman said, "No, I've not experienced discrimination. I've been in the right place at the right time. The Civil Rights Movement, The Feminist Movement all occurred in my life. I haven't suffered discrimination professionally. Of course, sometimes people have been less than accepting of me" (emphasis ours). Most women principals we interviewed perceived no discrimination because of gender.

Those few women who articulated examples of sex discrimination cited instances of unfair competition, lack of access to information or being mistreated by the system. Two women, who had become secondary principals before 1980 reported active discrimination in their efforts to obtain a principalship. Even after experiencing active discrimination, however both ranked low on the equity continuum; one gave no evidence of promoting equity in her school and the other gave level one responses.

Discrimination seems not to be an issue for most of the women principals we interviewed. Those few women who reported instances of discrimination did not translate their personal experiences into an educational agenda to prevent such experiences for their students or teachers.

Results about Perceptions of Being a Woman Administrator

Matthews, in a study of women high school principals and vice principals, derived four categories of commitment and concern toward feminism; she labelled them; isolates, individualists, advocates and activists (1985). Isolates and the

individualists, differing by degree, did not believe sex discrimination existed, had never experienced discrimination, had their careers sponsored by men, eschewed membership in women's groups, and had an employment history in one school district. In contrast, advocates and activists, differing by degree, reported first hand experience with sex discrimination, served in several schools districts, belonged to women's groups, and actively pursued feminist issues. The Women school administrators we interviewed held diverse views on being a woman and about feminism. Some eschewed membership in women's groups, whereas others were actively involved in formal women's organizations or in informal women support groups.

We asked the question, "do you consider yourself a feminist?" All women in our sample, regardless of their experience or involvement in women's groups, rejected the label, "feminist". One experienced high school principal,for example, who, reported facing many instances of sex discrimination in her long career in one metropolitan school district said it was "sad" that women couldn't help each other but that it would be "political suicide" to belong to a women's group (though she had been a participant in a women's advocacy group prior to her appointment as a principal). She responded, "No, I don't consider myself to be a feminist; I'm reasonable and logical." She also went on to say, "But I must be careful with my male colleagues. Perhaps I am a feminist because I am often at odds with my colleagues because I am woman." Another woman, a first year principal, belonged to a formal women's administrative

organization and an informal support group of woman administrators in her district, also responded "no", she did not consider herself a feminist. She reported, "I've always hated the cattiness of women, some of my best friends are men." She stated most of her support came in the district from other women principals yet in her school her support came from the few men on the staff; she deplored the women teachers who are,..."housewifes who just want to get out of the house. They are not professionals, they have no career aspirations." Yet she concluded the interview speaking at length about the strain of simultaneously balancing the demands of her school and family life. Apparently she realized no dissonance.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS:

Our small study of women principals indicate little attitudinal support or action to foster equity practices in schools. Issues of discrimination, biased curriculum materials, and support and encouragement to women staff are missing from the agenda of women school leaders we interviewed. Why were these women administrators not equity advocates? What did we learn from talking to this small sample of women to explain their inattention to gender differentials in educational practice?

Most of the literature on sex differentiation in school administration is directed toward: A) describing the internal and external barriers to women's advancement in the predominantly male hierarchy (for example see Shakeshaft, 1985; Schmuck, 1975, Havens, 1980, Adkison, 1981); B) comparing similarities and differences between men and women principals (see Gross & Trask,

1976; Charters & Jovick, 1981); or C) elucidating the sex bias inherent in administrative theory (see Yeaky, Johnson, Adkison, 1986; Shakeshaft and Nowell, 1984). So far there has been little attention paid to the views and practices of women administrators, themselves beneficiaries of a national effort to achieve equal educational and employment opportunities

We will explore three issues which help explain why woman administrators tend not to be equity advocates. The three issues are: information about equity and women's issues, personal and professional identity, and integration into the prevailing culture.

Information About Equity and Women's Issues

One reason for women administrators' insensitivity to equal educational or employment opportunity is that they have not been educated to pay attention to such issues. Furthermore, the women principals we interviewed, even those activists who work for equality in the administrative domain, hold relatively traditional and negative stereotypes about women as a group and women as teachers. They may recognize unique problems facing them as women in school administration but tend not to see the larger social issue of "womens place" in the educational hierarchy. They posit an explanation of individual deficiency (i.e., women teachers have no career ambitions, just want to get out of the house) but do not see the structural or cultural factors which perpetuate gender segregation in educational institutions.

Pre-Service Programs in Higher Education: Pre-service programs for teachers and administrators seldom incorporate the theory that schools perpetuate gender and race inequality in the society. Howe (1979) has shown that while some women's studies courses are increasing and focus on women's experience in the culture, seldom are these courses in schools of education.

All states require the administrative certificate; there are nearly 300 educational administration programs (Murphy and Hallinger, 1987). The dominant tradition in training school administrators is influenced strongly by objective, value-free social science inquiry into organizational settings. The social science theory movement has been chided by those who claim departments of educational administration fail to discuss relevant social issues and pay no attention to issues of sex, race or social class (for example see Yeaky, Johnson and Adkison, 1986). Departments of educational administration are the first stage of socialization into the world of public school administration and equity concerns are not included. Not only does the curriculum represent a male bias, women, although increasing in certification and doctoral programs, continue to face unique difficulties in their student roles. Webb (1987), representing four departments of educational administration, addressed the psychological and structural factors which discriminate against women students. It should be noted that these four schools -- University of Oregon, Rutgers, University of Arizona and University of Georgia -- were all chosen as exemplary models of departments attempting to provide equal

educational opportunity for their female students yet each points out how women students are disadvantaged. Male or female administrators' have little or no preparation for developing an equity agenda in their roles as school leaders. It is no wonder that women administrators tend not to address equity in their schools; they have had no opportunity to do so in their preparatory programs. We might better ask, how is it that any administrator develops an agenda toward providing equal educational opportunities in his or her school?

Professional Associations: Professional associations take responsibility for the continued professional development of administrators. Issues of equal educational opportunity and employment vie with other important school issues such as finance, excellence, reductions in force, declining test scores, capital improvements, educational reform, and demographic changes.

Whereas equity concerns were on the agenda of professional associations when the federal mandates emphasized compliance with Title IX, now it appears that the appetite for equality has abated at the federal level and professional associations have put equity on the back burner.

Many women administrators, however, have some exposure to equity. Fifteen of our interviewees had attended equity conferences, workshops or meetings at the Castle Rock Program in Arizona, by the American Institutes for Research in California or The Northwest Women in Educational Administration. And what do prospective women administrators learn at such meetings? They

learn how to write resumes, how to deal with sexist questions in job interviews, how to cope with sexist attitudes on the job and how to successfully cope with being a "lone" woman in an administrative meeting. Such compensatory programs for women aspiring to leadership have been successful in assisting women to enter administration, but they have not assisted women administrators to build an equity agenda for schools nor to change existing biases in school practice. Advocacy organizations for women administrators have been too narrow in their advocacy. They have promoted individual self-interest in career mobility, but not promoted a sense of responsibility for providing equality for students and other employees. They have encouraged individual women to become administrators, but they have not taught women administrators to encourage other females to seek similar positions. They have provided support for individual women, but have not imbued a sense that support received should be support returned

Women administrators are not trained to be sensitive observers to inequity in school organizations. Indeed, when we described an equity agenda with some of our interviewees, many were surprised, "I had not thought of that" was a common response. Women educators, like men educators, have not "thought about" how schools subtly or blatantly perpetuate inequality.

Personal and Professional Identity

From our interviewees we discerned considerable struggle in their personal and professional identity as women and as administrators. One woman high school principal reported being

asked how she manages her traditional role as a wife and mother and her non-traditional role as a high school principal. "Who cooks your family's dinner when you are here so late?" Another woman reported that profanity was always followed by an apology at administrative meetings. Another reported a parent delegation visited the superintendent because they believed she could not be "tough enough." Not only must women encounter the traditional stereotypes of women from their staff, their colleagues, the community and their superiors, they must encounter researchers, such as us, who ask pointed questions about their role as women administrators.

Catherine Marshall (1985) notes that women administrators are "abnormal women and abnormal administrators". She describes a continuum of personal identity stages through which women must pass if they are to become school administrators. She notes the first stage is where women are "culturally defined"; they accept the gender based roles for women in society. Women, in order to have career aspirations which are not traditionally defined must move beyond that stage. During the second stage, women struggle against the culturally defined female roles; they resist the change of identity while, simultaneously, they feel the pull of career. Finally, according to Marshall, women move to a new stage of self-definition; one that is freed from the restrictions of female gender based roles. Woman must struggle to overcome the culturally-defined role of female; thus she becomes an "abnormal woman." Women must also struggle to overcome the culturally defined role of school leader as male which exists in

textbooks, journals and in the public mind. Thus, they struggle with the view of being not only abnormal women but abnormal administrators.

Most women in our study reported positive instances of "not being treated like a woman but just another administrator." They don't want to be viewed as abnormal women nor abnormal administrators. Even if they have come to terms with their individual identity, they are reminded of their unique and abnormal status frequently by staff, parents, peers or students. Some said, "I just want to be one of the guys." For most, their hope was to be judged by their competence and not by their gender. It is understandable that many women administrators want to forget about the concept of gender; it plagues them in most unsettling ways from many fronts. They are continually reminded that they are not in the mainstream.

Integration and Segregation

The women we talked to clearly wanted to integrate themselves into the prevailing culture; they did not want to be viewed as women but as administrators. It is understandable that women administrators want to be integrated into the administrative culture. Administrators who are alienated from their peers will not successfully accomplish their administrative tasks.

The rise to school administration involves subtle socialization into the new role. New principals, male and female, voice the difficulties in the transition from the role of teacher to the role of administrators (Duke, et al, 1984)

Loneliness and the changed nature of their interactions with former teacher colleagues often are mentioned as one of the surprises of becoming an administrator. New principals, who have interacted with teachers as peers are suddenly thrust into new role relationships which can be uncomfortable and confusing. Women administrators face the inevitable problems inherent in role change. In addition, they face the unique problem of moving from a teaching culture which is predominantly female, especially in the elementary school, to an administrative culture which is predominantly male.

Blumberg and Greenfield (1986) and Wolcott (1975) provide rich descriptions of the world of the principal. In vivid detail they describe the professional and personal struggles of those in the administrative role. Most of their descriptions are about men. There is a new body of literature emerging which describes the lives of teachers (Freedman et al 1983, Biklen, 1987, Lightfoot, 1983). Most of those descriptions are about women. The administrative culture and the teaching culture differ considerably; they differ on educational concerns, perceptions of power and influence, the people with whom one interacts and the type of work to be done. New administrators must learn the ropes of the new administrative culture; they must change their perceptions, their vista of concern and the nature of their work. Women administrators, in addition, must leave the predominantly female culture of teaching and enter the predominantly male culture of administration. Women administrators must choose between their same-sex culture of teachers and the other-sex

culture of administrators. One principal reported that the women teachers in her building "think I should better understand their problems because I am a woman." She went on to say how she "bends over backwards" not to give preferential treatment to women teachers. "I want to be an effective administrator, not an effective woman," she reported.

Women administrators must decide whether to affiliate with women's groups. Some see it as "political suicide", yet others take a more sanguine view. One woman, a first year principal, was part of an informal women's group in a district where the number of women elementary principals had risen appreciably in the last three years. She reported the importance of that group; it supported her, it gave her the "inside scoop," it advised her and she often called on members of that group. But, she cautioned, "We don't want to splinter off, we try to balance. It's nice to have men and women working together." Politically, as well as personally, these women are torn between their choices; they are torn between being segregated in a culture of women and being integrated in the culture of men. Although a few women seemed to traverse both cultures successfully, even they surmised that they could not be the advocate for female issues within the male culture of administration. As one woman said, "If I took up every gender issue that was raised I would essentially be rendered ineffective in my role." So she took up no gender issue.

CONCLUSION

There are more women administrators today compared to 15 years ago, yet our study indicates that women principals tend not to be equity advocates in their schools. Of the nineteen principals interviewed, only four (21%) elementary principals demonstrated an agenda for equality; two were black principals concerned about racial equality, two were white principals concerned about gender equity. Our findings support a structurlist view that women principals have adapted to the prevailing norms of the administrative culture regarding equity. We do believe that the increase of women as principals, per se, will not lead to greater sensitivity or attention to gender and race inequality in our schools.

Although women principals are a minority and have unique problems of identity and integration, they do not translate their own experiences into action to assure greater equality for students or employers in school settings. They take a personalized view of their experience. Although, we applaud the continuing efforts to reach gender equity in administration and believe that women have successfully demonstrated their administrative competence, we cannot presume that because a woman is in charge, that issues of equity will be addressed. We point to the importance of educating female and male administrators about gender and race inequality through university preparatory programs and through professional associations. We note especially that women's professional associations have taken too narrow a view; they have focused on individual career success

rather than a more comprehensive and critical view of how schools perpetuate inequality for students and professionals on the basis of race and gender.

Women administrators see their experiences as personal, even idiosyncratic, and fail to comprehend the more fundamental and generalized concept of how gender serves as a critical structural factor in educational hierarchies. We believe it is this personalistic and idiosyncratic view of their experience and their lack of a larger understanding of the concept of gender which leads to women administrators insensitivity and inattention to equity in school ideology and practice.

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